

AUTISM FACTS

One of the least understood of all developmental disabilities is autism. Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life, resulting from a neurological disorder that affects brain functioning which interferes with communication, learning, behavior and social development.

New developments in research and therapy have unlocked some of autism's mysteries, and with them, some of the lives affected by autism. The prevalence of autism and autism spectrum disorders is estimated to occur in as many as one in every 250 individuals or more. This equates to well over 22,000 persons in Missouri.



SYMPTOMS

- ◆ Impairment in communication or absence of speech
- ◆ Difficulty interacting with or responding to other people
- ◆ Resistance to change in routine; insistence on sameness
- ◆ Unusual responses to sensations
- ◆ Abnormal ways of relating to people, objects, and events
- ◆ Repetitive body motions and repetitive use of language

CAUSES

While first identified in 1943, it is not precisely known what causes autism. It may have many causes, including the following:

- ◆ Rubella or cytomegalovirus during the mother's pregnancy
- ◆ Inflammation of the child's brain in infancy
- ◆ Lack of oxygen at birth
- ◆ Chemical exposure during the mother's pregnancy
- ◆ Untreated phenylketonuria (PKU)
- ◆ Genetic predisposition to autism

TREATMENT

Persons of all ages who have autism can make considerable strides when appropriate treatment is available. Training tailored to the individual with autism is key. Adjusting the diet or properly monitored medication may help some people. Supportive counseling for family members is an important option. The cost of life-long care may be reduced by two-thirds with early diagnosis and intervention (Knapp, London School of Economics 2001). Early diagnosis and treatment may be composed of the following:

- ◆ Parent/caregiver training and behavior support therapy
- ◆ Occupational therapy/sensory integration
- ◆ Communication/language therapy
- ◆ Crisis intervention
- ◆ Family support and education with home intervention
- ◆ Applied Behavior Analysis or other intensive intervention programs

MISSOURI'S AUTISM PROJECTS

Since 1991, consumer-driven autism projects have been developed to serve more than 2,000 families each year in Missouri. All of the projects have been developed by parents and are monitored by parent advisory committees. The Department of Mental Health's Division of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities coordinates and funds the projects.

For more information/referral, people may contact the following projects. To determine which project is available to you, contact Missouri's Coordinator for Autism Services.

**MISSOURI'S COORDINATOR FOR AUTISM SERVICES
MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH
DIVISION OF MENTAL RETARDATION AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**

P. O. Box 687, Jefferson City, MO 65102
573-751-4054 • 573-526-1201 (TT) • 800-207-9329 • 573-751-9207 (fax)
www.dmh.mo.gov

CENTRAL MISSOURI AUTISM PROJECT

200 S. Keene St., Columbia, MO 65201
573-874-3777 • 800-675-4241 • 573-874-3880 (fax)

EAST MISSOURI AUTISM PROJECT

ST. LOUIS REGIONAL CENTER

3101 Chouteau, St. Louis, MO 63103
314-301-3900 • 314-301-3905 (TT) • 800-358-7665 • 314-301-3904 (fax)

NORTHWEST MISSOURI AUTISM PROJECT

KANSAS CITY REGIONAL CENTER

821 E. Admiral Blvd., P.O. Box 412557, Kansas City, MO 64141
816-889-3400 • 800-454-2331 • 816-889-3325 (fax)

SOUTHEAST MISSOURI AUTISM PROJECT

909 Broadway, Cape Girardeau, MO 63701
573-339-9300 • 866-339-9300 • 573-339-7964 (fax) or call Betty Hearnese at 573-683-6187

SOUTHWEST MISSOURI AUTISM PROJECT

1740 S. Glenstone, Suite S, Springfield, MO 65804
417-890-1399 • 800-420-7410 • 417-890-1775 (fax)

STATEWIDE FACTS

- ◆ Currently, 1,800 families and their sons and daughters with autism receive services, including family support.
- ◆ The Missouri Advisory Committee on Autism, with membership from the five projects, develops statewide policies to ensure project unity, communication, and coordination with other agencies.
- ◆ The Division of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities annually sponsors the National Autism Symposium attended by parents and professionals from Missouri and many other states.

Missouri Autism Research and Response Agenda

The Missouri Autism Research and Response Agenda (MARRA) was organized to establish a cohesive, integrated research agenda to positively affect the lives of people who may have an autism spectrum disorder. MARRA is composed of parent representatives as well as staff from a number of state agencies and outstanding universities in the state of Missouri. Goals for MARRA include continuous emphasis on research efforts, coordinated dissemination of information regarding services, and formation of a registry and voluntary database to track the progress of people and families affected by autism.